

# Free Men (Les hommes libres)



**DIRECTED BY:** Ismaël Ferroukhi

**CERTIFICATE:** 12A

**RUNNING TIME:** 99 mins

**COUNTRY:** France

**LANGUAGE:** French

**RELEASE DATE:** 28th September 2011 (France), 25th May 2012 (UK)

**KEYWORDS:** drama, history, World War II, France, Holocaust

**SUITABLE FOR:** 14–19, French, media/film studies, history

## SYNOPSIS

During the Second World War, in Nazi-occupied Paris, a young Algerian named Younes is arrested by the French police for black market activities. Threatened with jail or deportation he agrees to spy on the Muslim community of the Mosque of Paris where the Rector, Si Kaddour Ben Ghabrit, is suspected of providing false identification documents to Jews and hiding them in the basement. In there, he befriends Salim, a young Jew from Algeria whose talent and charisma trigger Younes' transformation from an apolitical criminal to a fully-fledged freedom fighter.

## Note to teachers

Film Education has produced a free resource exploring representations of the Holocaust on film. The resource Thinking Film, Thinking History: The Holocaust, features film clips and classroom materials and is available to order at [www.filmeducation.org/thinkingfilm/history/](http://www.filmeducation.org/thinkingfilm/history/)

## THE TRAILER

Watch the trailer online, for example at [www.imdb.com/title/tt1699185/](http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1699185/) and then answer the following questions:

- What do you expect to be the main themes of the film?
- Who are the main characters?
- Does the trailer persuade you to watch the film? Explain your answer, considering who you think the trailer, and film, are intended to appeal to.
- Based on your understanding from the trailer, work in small groups to write a summary of the film in no more than six sentences.

You will need to review your answers after watching the film.

## THE FILM POSTERS

Compare the French and the UK posters of the film with the table below and explain the differences. (try [www.allocine.fr/film/fichefilm-178980/photos/detail/?cmediafile=19802069](http://www.allocine.fr/film/fichefilm-178980/photos/detail/?cmediafile=19802069) and [www.imdb.com/media/rm2576463616/tt1699185](http://www.imdb.com/media/rm2576463616/tt1699185))

	French poster	UK poster
title and tagline		
characters		
setting		
background		

- Which poster do you prefer? Explain the reasons for your choice.
- What message does the poster aim to communicate about the film and how does it achieve this?
- If you were to redesign the poster for a re-release of the film, which different elements or information would you include? Plan a new design for the poster, thinking about how you could appeal to particular audiences.

### CRITICISM AND REVIEWS

When it was released *Free Men* received some good reviews from professional critics and regular viewers.

- Conduct online research into critical responses to the film. Can you find three positive and three negative reviews of the film?
  
- Which of these do you agree or disagree with? Refer to particular details in your answer.

### GENRE

The opening scene states that the film is ‘inspired by true stories’. Ismaël Ferroukhi collaborated closely with Benjamin Stora, who is a historian with expertise on North Africa, to write the script. Until recently little was known about the part played by the Mosque of Paris in saving Jewish fugitives and resistance activists.

Although we know that Si Kaddour Ben Ghabrit is a historical figure and was the Rector of the Mosque in 1942, Younes is a fictional character added to the plot for dramatic purposes. Why do you think the director has chosen to do this? To what extent does this invalidate the film’s historical setting?

From what you understand of the film so far, including your viewing of the trailer, which genre do you think *Free Men* belongs to? For each genre suggest an argument for and against categorising the film in this way:

	Arguments for	Arguments against
historical drama		
thriller		
character study		
action film		
war movie		

## HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Many films have been made about World War II and the Holocaust. The uniqueness of *Free Men* resides in its focus on the North African community in Paris. We learn a lot about whom Stora calls the 'invisible men'. It is estimated that up to 100,000 Algerians lived in the capital at that time. They did not have recognised or official status having left their native colonised Algeria to move to occupied France.

- Explain the term 'free men', and who you think it refers to in the film. Why do you think this phrase is used?

Some elements of Ferroukhi's and Stora's research were introduced in the film.

- Justify the importance of the scene at the cemetery
- Look closely at the following images; one is a film still and the other an archive photograph from the 1940s. In what ways, and why, are these images similar and different?



[http://www.cairn.info/resume.php?ID\\_ARTICLE=AJ\\_451\\_0116](http://www.cairn.info/resume.php?ID_ARTICLE=AJ_451_0116)



[http://www.notrecinema.com/communaute/v1\\_detail\\_film.php3?lefilm=36077](http://www.notrecinema.com/communaute/v1_detail_film.php3?lefilm=36077)

- What do you think are the difficulties associated with constructing film narratives 'inspired by true stories'?

Other films that explore similar themes include *La Rafle* (in English *The Round-Up*), and the short film *Ensemble*. Find out more about these films:

- Watch the seventeen-minute short *Ensemble*: <http://vimeo.com/39721018>

View the trailer for *La Rafle (The Round-Up)* [www.imdb.com/title/tt1382725/](http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1382725/) and read Film Education's study notes for the film: [www.filmeducation.org/resources/film\\_library/getfilm.php?film=2329](http://www.filmeducation.org/resources/film_library/getfilm.php?film=2329).

For further historical context, see the website [ww2history.com/](http://ww2history.com/) including the interactive timeline on the homepage.

## NARRATIVE

Ferroukhi opted for a linear story line in *Free Men*.

- How might you explain the director's choice for a chronological narrative?
- To what extent do you feel the linear plot makes the film too simplistic for the audience?
- Think back to a particular moment in the film where the story could include a flashback sequence. Create your own storyboard for the scene, introducing a flashback.

The film is composed of two intertwined plots. The first is the gradual and steady metamorphosis of a self-centred Younes who comes to Paris to provide for his family with his black market activities. The second plot focuses on his growing friendship with a Jewish gay singer.

- How do the two stories support the need for historical accuracy and provide dramatic entertainment?
- Do you think the friendship between two unlikely characters is a success in the film?

## CHARACTERS

### YOUNES

His personal transformation from an apolitical illiterate profiteer to a passionate freedom fighter is central to the film.

- Compare Younes' character at the start of the film with that at the end and explain how his character has changed.
- Put the following ideas down in the order of their significance in influencing Younes into becoming a resistance member, beginning with the most important factor, and explain your reasons:
  - friendship with Salim
  - knowledge of politics
  - meeting Lubna (the mysterious woman at the Mosque)
  - deal with French police to collaborate
  - spying on Si Kaddour Ben Ghabrit
- Many critics have said Tahar Rahim who plays Younes is reminiscent of a young Robert De Niro. What do you think is meant by this – what might the critics be referring to?

### SI KADDOUR BEN GHABRIT

During the course of the film we see the Rector in a number of different ways.

- How is this character introduced to us?
- What do we learn about him in his dealings with the Nazi officers, the French officials and Younes?
- Was Michael Lonsdale the right choice to play this character?
- What other actor might have been a good 'fit' for this role?

## FILMMAKING TECHNIQUES

Colours, camerawork and music can have a significant emotional impact in a film.

- Contrast the colours used in the scenes showing occupied Paris and the colours for the scenes of the Muslim areas (hotels, cabaret bars, the Mosque).
- Which musical instrument do you associate with Younes? Why?
- Think back to a scene where you felt colour or music was significant. In what ways do colour and music affect your response at this point in the film?



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## ACTIVITES EN FRANCAIS

### LIRE ET ECOUTER

Complétez les blancs avec le vocabulaire proposé et écoutez pour vérifier sur <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1699185/>

- Et les \_\_\_\_\_ c'est pour qui ?
- Pour moi.
- Allez, emmenez-le.
  
- Il est pas juif, c'est un musulman.
  
- Je te propose un \_\_\_\_\_ : tu vas surveiller les entrées et les \_\_\_\_\_ de toutes les personnes qui rendent visite au directeur. Je compte sur tous les visiteurs étrangers à la mosquée.
  
- J'étais au courant \_\_\_\_\_ le début.
  
- J'ai des documents à remettre à une personne du XIème arrondissement.
  
- Je peux pas prendre de risques pour des personnes que je ne \_\_\_\_\_ pas, allez j'ai déjà assez de problèmes.
  
- Mais c'est qu'à toi que je peux \_\_\_\_\_ ce service.
  
- Y'a personne, la famille a été arrêtée ce matin. Les parents me les ont amenés ce matin avant que la police débarque. On peut pas les garder ici. Qu'est-ce que vous \_\_\_\_\_ faire ?
  
- Laisse-les entrer.
  
- Avec votre permission on ne devrait \_\_\_\_\_ se mêler des affaires des Allemands.
- Je sais. Venez les enfants.
  
- \_\_\_\_\_ t'es venu à Paris ?
- J'ai un frère qui est \_\_\_\_\_ Allemagne. Il est dans un camp de prisonniers depuis le début de la guerre.
  
- Elle savait ce qu'elle faisait Younes, son frère \_\_\_\_\_ parmi les évadés. Elle est transférée à Fresnes.
  
- Un terroriste blessé est \_\_\_\_\_ ici pour se faire soigner.

pas	depuis	pourquoi	demander
en	marché	sorties	venu
était	ravitaillements	connais	pouvez

### PARLER

Complétez le tableau pour décrire Younes au début et à la fin du film. Expliquez oralement les différences du personnage.

Younes au début	Younes à la fin
exemple : indifférent	exemple : altruiste

### GRAMMAIRE

Complétez la biographie du réalisateur avec les verbes au présent. Vérifiez vos réponse sur <http://www.allocine.fr/personne/fichepersonne-8777/filmographie/>

Né au Maroc, Ismaël Ferroukhi (**arriver**) en France durant son enfance et (**grandir**) dans une petite ville du sud. En 1992, il (**écrire**) et (**réaliser**) son premier court métrage, *L'Exposé*, sélectionné à Cannes dans la catégorie Cinéma en France. Il y (**obtenir**) le prix du meilleur court métrage et le prix Kodak. Cette même année, le jury du Festival de Clermont-Ferrand lui (**décerner**) son prix spécial.

Deux ans plus tard, il (**rencontrer**) Cédric Kahn et co-écrit avec lui *Trop de bonheur*. Le film, co-produit par Arte, est présenté à Cannes. S'en (**suivre**) une autre collaboration entre les deux hommes puisqu'ils (**écrire**) ensemble *Culpabilité zéro*. En 1996, il (**réaliser**) son second court métrage, *L'Inconnu*, avec dans le rôle titre une certaine Catherine Deneuve. Dans un même temps, il (**écrire**) et (**mettre**) en scène deux téléfilms (*Un été aux hirondelles* et *Petit Ben*).

Son premier long métrage, *Le Grand voyage*, (**voir**) le jour en 2004. En racontant l'histoire de Reda, un jeune lycéen qui (**devoir**) conduire son père à la Mecque, Ismaël Ferroukhi (**obtenir**) les éloges de la profession et (**recevoir**) le Prix Luigi de Laurentiis du Meilleur premier film à la Mostra de Venise 2004. Après ce succès, il (**retrouver**) Cédric Kahn et co-écrit avec lui *L'Avion*, un récit poétique sur l'enfance avec Isabelle Carré et Vincent Lindon. Il (**rejoindre**) ensuite le collectif Enfances pour lequel il réalise un court métrage sur l'enfance de Jean Renoir avec Clotilde Hesme.

En 2011 (**sortir**) sur les écrans son second long métrage ayant pour thématique centrale la religion : *Les Hommes libres*. Pour l'occasion, il (**faire**) de Tahar Rahim un jeune algérien vivant du marché noir pendant la Seconde Guerre mondiale qui (**voir**) sa vie transformée lorsque la police l' (**arrêter**) et l' (obliger) à espionner la Grande Mosquée de Paris.

## ECRIRE

Traduisez la biographie de l'exercice précédent.

Répondez aux questions en français:

- Résumez le film en 250-300 mots.
- Choisissez le personnage le plus important du film et expliquez pourquoi.
- Si Kaddour Benghabrit est un héros. Pourquoi ?
- Younes est un lâche. Etes-vous d'accord ?

## INTERESTING LINKS

### English

<http://medias.unifrance.org/medias/127/8/67711/presse/les-hommes-libres-2011-presskit-anglais-2.pdf>

<http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/review/free-men-les-hommes-libres-209354>

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/gog/movies/free-men-les-hommes-libres,1229696/critic-review.html>

<http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/films/reviews/free-men-12a-7786239.html>

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sCCPE\\_5ZwD4](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sCCPE_5ZwD4)

### French

<http://www.allocine.fr/personne/fichepersonne-8777/filmographie/>

<http://www.allocine.fr/film/fichefilm-178980/secrets-tournage/>

<http://medias.unifrance.org/medias/231/209/53735/presse/les-hommes-libres-2011-presskit-francais-1.pdf>

<http://www.rue89.com/2011/09/27/les-hommes-libres-lhistoire-oubliee-des-arabes-occupes-223665>

<http://www.telerama.fr/cinema/les-hommes-libres-une-scene-commentee-par-ismael-ferroukhi,73486.php>

[http://www.lemonde.fr/cinema/article/2011/09/27/les-hommes-libres-une-histoire-arabe-sous-l-occupation\\_1578368\\_3476.html](http://www.lemonde.fr/cinema/article/2011/09/27/les-hommes-libres-une-histoire-arabe-sous-l-occupation_1578368_3476.html)

Written by S. Renaudie